

# Buying a Bike



Bikes are just bikes, right? Wrong! Bikes vary a great deal in design, size, materials, quality and price. The best advice is to do your homework before you pull out the credit card. A delay of a few weeks may be the difference between whether you have tears of joy or pain, or even whether you keep riding.

## Top Tips

**Tip 1.** Talk to experienced cyclists about your new bike before you buy. Advice is valuable, but make sure the person is advising you about the type of cycling that you want to do.

**Tip 2.** Test ride as many different bikes as you can before you buy. Don't be shy. Test, test, test. Make sure you test ride your prospective new bike. Some bike shops will let you hire a bike for a daily or hourly fee as well.

## What sort of riding will you do?

A bike is a special tool that should meet your needs, so, you first need to work out what sort of riding you will do and how often. Consider these questions:

- Will my cycle routes be smooth or rough, sealed or unsealed?
- Will I be travelling short or long distances?
- Will I need to carry much stuff? Lots? Bulky? Basics?
- Is it important for me to travel quickly on my bike?
- Will I ride in mostly flat areas or mostly hilly areas?
- Will I want to ride competitively, for fitness or for recreation?
- Will I ride for local transport and/or commuting?
- How fit/experienced/skilled am I now or intend to become?

Answers to these questions will help you choose the right bike. Most cyclists need a bike that is a jack-of-all-trades but some own many bikes for different types of riding.

## What are the types of bikes?

Any bike can do any job and every bike does at least one thing well. You need to choose what is important to you and where to compromise.

### Road bikes - racing

Suitable to travel long distances at a faster pace on smoother roads. They have 700mm (27 inch) wheels, drop handlebars, thin high-pressure tyres, double chain rings, 12-20 gears ranging from medium to high, and are very lightweight. The riding position tends to be a low one, leaning well forward with the drop bars offering a number of different hand positions. This low forward leaning position can be uncomfortable but provides for the most aerodynamic

position and the most efficient pedaling. The bikes are quick steering and may have a very harsh feel. They are not designed for racks or mudguards.

### Road bikes - touring

Suitable for travelling long distances in relative comfort and/or carrying luggage on smooth to medium bitumen or gravel roads. They have 700mm wheels, drop handlebars, medium width tyres, triple chain rings, 18-27 gears ranging from low to high, and are fairly lightweight. The riding position is still a bent-over one but perhaps not quite as low as a racing bike, also with drop bars to provide hand position variety. They are more relaxed and comfortable in feel than racing bikes and often feature racks, luggage, mudguards and other add-ons. They are suitable for beginner to experienced riders.

### Mountain Bikes - road trim

Suitable for riding medium distances in comfort on smooth to rough pavements and roads. They have 26 inch (660mm) wheels, flat handlebars, smooth medium-width tyres (slicks), strong frames, triple chain rings, 18-27 gears ranging from very low to medium, and are medium-weight. The riding position on a MTB is usually a forward leaning one with the back bent at about 45 degrees and handlebar height set below the level of the saddle. Bar-ends can be fitted to provide greater variety for hand position. MTBs are relaxed in feel and often have mountings for racks and other add-ons which are used to customise them for road trim after purchase. They are suitable for beginner to experienced riders.

### Mountain bikes - off road trim

Suitable for short distances on rough or unsealed roads. They have 26 inch wheels, flat or riser handlebars, knobbly wide tyres, front (and possibly rear) suspension, strong frames, triple chain rings, 18-27 gears ranging from very low to medium, and are medium weight. The riding position is the same for the road trim (above). They are suitable for beginner to experienced riders. They are less common on road rides because most MTBs have been converted to road trim for that type of riding. They are very common in bike shops.

### Hybrid bikes (Flat-bar road bikes, Comfort, Multi-track)

Suitable for medium distances in comfort on smooth to rough pavements and roads including gravel roads. They have 700mm wheels, flat handlebars, smooth medium tyres, triple chain rings, 18-27 gears, ranging from low to high, and are fairly light weight. The riding position is much more upright than any other type of bike and for this reason they are often suitable for beginner riders. However, the upright position makes them less efficient than other bikes for hills or high speeds. They often have racks and other add-ons and are suitable for beginner to experienced riders. This type of bike is common for commuting and recreational riding.

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### ***Recumbents***

Recumbent bikes and trikes allow the rider to recline on a comfortable seat. These require a different pedaling action (and balancing style) which takes some getting used to. However, for long distances, they are the optimum in comfort and many are set up just for touring. They particularly shine on flats and downhill where the lower profile considerably reduces wind resistance. Riders say that they are always noticed by drivers because they are so different and the low height is not a disadvantage. The width of a trike can be a problem in bollard situations.

### ***Bikes for two***

The styles of tandems mirror the bikes above and you can have tandems with 26 inch or 700mm wheels, drop or flat bars, varying riding positions, but they always have triple chainrings and gears ranging from low to high. The benefit of a tandem is that two people of varying strength can ride together with a performance about the average of the two.

They are similar to recumbents in that they are very fast downhill due to the extra weight, and also along the flat due to less wind resistance, but they are slower uphill. They are much less manoeuvrable than single bikes and therefore are not suited to tight situations found on many cycleways. Tandems cost about twice the price of a similarly equipped single bike.

### ***What about the size of the bike?***

Your bike frame should be the right size for you and not the one that is on the shop floor, at a good price. Buying the wrong size frame is potentially the biggest mistake you can make because it is so difficult to remedy. The frame is the one item that most people don't want to replace so you need to get it right. There are many books and references on this subject and most experienced cyclists or bike shop owners can also advise about sizing. If you are not familiar with riding a particular type of bike then it will feel strange at first but you will soon adapt so, although important, don't rely totally on your own first impressions. How a bike feels will vary between individuals based on your physique, flexibility, injuries, strength and riding experience. Try to ride as many bikes as possible for as long as possible, to become familiar with the style of bike that you're interested in so that you can choose the size that you really need.

### ***How much should I spend?***

The cost of a bike is an issue for every cyclist and they range from \$150 to \$10,000 and you generally get what you pay for. For more money you get better materials, better construction, more features, lighter weight, more adjustability and easier operation. However, any bike is better than no bike. With some care and maintenance, simpler and cheaper bikes will last for decades.

As a general guide we recommend that you purchase your bike at a bike shop rather than through a chain store. The

best bikes in a chain store are generally not as good as the cheapest bikes in the bike store. Also the staff in a chain store are not trained or experienced in advising you, nor in proper assembly and adjustment of bikes.

Cheaper components will quickly wear out and most items can be upgraded when they are replaced. The main exception is the bike frame, which is rarely replaced. Our basic advice is to determine your budget, and then spend as much as you can afford, while not forgetting to hold some funds back for other essential items such as helmet, pump, repair kit, tube and basic tools.

### ***What about second hand bikes?***

A second-hand bike can be purchased at all levels of quality and is an excellent way to obtain a better quality bike for a cheaper price. Anyone who has tried to sell a bike will tell you that the value drops very quickly and, as a purchaser, you can take advantage of that. Good quality components are still good quality when second hand. However, there are some pitfalls to watch out for including a bent or damaged frame, a stolen bike, lack of warranty and not knowing a fair price. Another concern is buying old components which may no longer be compatible or replaceable today, eg freewheel design has changed over the years.

### ***What about that old bike in the shed?***

Any bike is better than no bike! Even if you think that you will be buying a new bike, it is worth dusting off that old one first. You can start to gain fitness and experience and work out what you need.

### ***What is the most important thing?***

For many cyclists the most important issue is the gears available, while others look for comfort, or luggage features. Some want robust and long-lasting bikes while others want light weight. Remember that the best bike might not be the one that feels comfortable when you sit on it in the shop. A bike is a dynamic machine. It has to work best when you are working; climbing; descending; fast; slow; under brakes; or just cruising.

### ***Beginner cyclists***

Most beginner cyclists should choose an all purpose bike with suitably low gears and the potential to be used as a recreational bike, a commuter bike or for local transport. Hybrid or mountain bikes (in road trim) would be a common solution. As you develop as a cyclist, you will probably buy a replacement or an additional bike as your needs change.